THE UNKNOWN LAND

Early exploration in Canada

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The Atlantic Coast and the St. Lawrence Basin (cases 1-3)

Although it is now known that Norsemen from Greenland visited North America about 1000 A.D., their knowledge of the New World was lost to Europe in succeeding centuries. To John Cabot, an Italian sailing under letters patent from Henry VII of England, is credited the re-discovery of the mainland of North America about 1497. From King Henry's grant, here printed by Richard Hakluyt in his Principall navigations, voiages and discoveries of the English (1589),* originates the English claim to discoveries in Canada which were to rival French claims until the eighteenth century. The world map of Juan de la Cosa* (about 1500) in the Museo naval in Madrid is considered to be the only contemporary evidence of Cabot's discoveries. The northern coast of America is marked with English flags, and Spanish discoveries in the Caribean are also recorded. The rest of the coast was probably supplied from maps of China. The desire to reach the fabled riches of Asia was to be the principal motive in the exploration of Canada for many years.

With the voyages of Jacques Cartier, sailing in the service of the French king François 1, the outlines of eastern Canada began to be filled in. In his first voyage of 1534 he explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and on his second visit discovered the great river itself, exploring it as far as Hochelaga. His account of his travels was published in 1545 as Brief recit & succinte narration ... de la nauigation faite es ysles de Canada, Hochelaga & Saguenay, now a very rare volume. Exhibited here is an Italian translation by Giovanni Battista Ramusio in his Navigationi et viaggi (1565),* which was the source for the first English translation made by John Florio in 1580. The Harleian world map of 1542,* showing Cartier and company on the south side of the St. Lawrence river, indicates the extent of contemporary knowledge of Canada now clearly named.

To Champlain belongs the honour of discovering what lay beyond the rapids of Hochelaga. As early as his first voyage of 1603 he was able to reconstruct the network of the Great Lakes from talking to the Indians. His early exploration, however, was of the Bay of Fundy (Baie française) and resulted in the establishment of Port Royal in the Annapolis Valley. With the voyage of 1608 to 1610 French interest turned to the St. Lawrence and a settlement at Quebec. In the following years Champlain explored the Richelieu River and reached the lake now named after him, explored and wrote the first description of the Ottawa River, and reached Lake Huron by way of Lake Nipissing and the French River.

Champlain published several accounts of his explorations, now very scarce in their original editions. The Voyages et descovvertes faites en la Nouvelle France, depuis l'année 1615 iusques à la fin de l'année 1618 (1620?)* and Voyages de la Nouvelle France occidentale, dicte Canada (1632)*

* Items shown in the exhibition.

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shown here were the gift of Prof. J. Home Cameron who collated the French texts for the scholarly collected edition of Champlain's Works published by the Champlain Society in 1922-36. Champlain's maps* of 1607, 1612 and 1632 reproduced in this edition demonstrate his growing knowledge of eastern Canada. Delisle's map of New France* (dated 1703 but probably printed some time after 1716) shows the extent of French exploration a century after Champlain. The Great Lakes are clearly recognizable and the network of rivers draining into Hudson Bay have been charted.

Hudson Bay (case 4)

The impetus for exploring Hudson Bay itself was the hope that would lead to a north west passage to Asia. In 1610 Henry Hudson sailed north of Labrador through Hudson Strait into the Bay the eastern side of which he explored as far south as James Bay. The mutiny of the crew and their abandonment of Hudson are well known. For most of our knowledge of this tragic story we are indebted to Samuel Purchas who published papers he had received from the expedition's promoter in Purchas his Pilgrimes (1625).* The only detailed account is by Abacuk Pricket, who was later tried and acquitted for the mutiny. It is a clever apology which casts some, but not too much doubt on Hudson himself and principally blames those mutineers who had died. Captions and running titles such as "wicked and wretched end of wretched wicked men" make the most of the dramatic story.

In 1631 Luke Fox and Thomas James led rival expeditions on behalf of the merchants of London and Bristol. Both explored the west coast of Hudson Bay and met briefly. James' party spent a bitter winter in the Bay which bears his name and returned home the following year to find that Fox's party had preceded them by many months. James' account of his adventures, The strange and dangerovs voyage of Captaine Thomas Iames (1633)* was a great literary success and may have been a source for Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Fox was the greater navigator and contributed more to geographic discovery. The very rare circumpolar map published in his North-vvest Fox (1635)* has been called one of the most important documents in the history of Arctic exploration.

The voyages of James, Fox and others in the seventeenth century led to the conclusion that the north west passage was not to be found through Hudson Bay. An expedition in 1746 on which Henry Ellis served as hydrographer reinforced this conclusion. The map in his Voyage to Hudson's Bay by the Dobbs Galley and California in the years 1746 and 1747, for discovering a north west passage (1748)* shows a solid land mass north of Hudson Bay.

The North West (cases 5-6)

The left hand side of Ellis' map is labelled "parts unknown". The exploration and mapping of western Canada was the work of the next half century. In 1691 Henry Kelsey, a Hudson's Bay Company employee, had been the first European to reach the Prairies, but no immediate attempt had been made to follow in his footsteps. In the 1730's and 1740's La Vérendrye and his sons explored the country between Lake Superior and the Saskatchewan River. In 1754 Anthony Henday reached the foothills of the Rockies. But it was the rivalry for the fur trade between the Hudson's Bay Company and the new North West Company in the later part of the eighteenth century that stimulated more extensive exploration. Hearne, Turnor, Fidler, Mackenzie and Thompson all worked for one or other of these two companies.

Setting out in 1770 from Hudson Bay Samuel Hearne reached the mouth of the Coppermine River on the Arctic Ocean in July of the following year, proving in his own words that "the Continent of America is much wider than most people imagine." His account of his journey was not written until almost twenty years later, after he had retired from a busy life in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company, and was first published posthumously in 1795. The Dublin edition of 1796* and the Paris edition of 1798-99* shown in the exhibition belonged to the great explorer and geologist Joseph Burr Tyrrell and were used by him in editing Hearne's Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the northern ocean for the Champlain Society in 1911. Tyrrell's own photographs including this one of Hearne's inscription on a rock near Hudson's Bay, illustrate the Champlain Society's edition.*

Alexander Mackenzie's two famous exploratory journeys were made while he was a partner of the North West Company. In 1789 he travelled from Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca by way of Slave River and Great Slave Lake down the great river now named after him to its mouth on the Arctic Ocean. On his second journey four years later he reached the Pacific Ocean, the first European to cross the North American continent north of Mexico. On exhibit are two copies of his Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence, through the continent of North America, to the frozen and Pacific Oceans, in the years 1789 and 1793 (1801),* one of which is the author's presentation copy to his rivals in the Hudson's Bay Company.

While Hearne and Mackenzie made names for themselves in spectacular journeys lasting at most two years, David Thompson spent more than a quarter of a century exploring and surveying the country west of the Lake of the Woods. Yet he remained almost unknown until his Narrative of his explorations in Western America, 1784-1812,* written at the end of his life in conditions of great poverty, was published in 1916. J.B. Tyrrell, who had owned the manuscript for many years, had been unable to find a publisher until the Champlain Society provided the opportunity. Tyrrell, described by a later editor as "that prince of modern surveyors," was the

ideal editor for Hearne and Thompson as he knew the country and its hardships through personal experience. Thompson's manuscript later became the possession of the University of Toronto Library through Tyrrell's bequest. Shown are corresponding passages in the manuscript and printed text describing Thompson's explorations in the Kootenay district.

The Pacific Coast (cases 7-8)

The Pacific coast had been reached by sea some years earlier by Vitus Bering who sighted the coast of Alaska in 1741 and Juan Perez who visited Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1774. But the first detailed knowledge dates from the last voyage of James Cook in 1778. His almost continuous running survey of the north west coast appears in the atlas which accompanies his Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, undertaken by the command of His Majesty, for making discoveries in the northern hemisphere (1784).*

In the following years many ships visited the coast for exploration and trade. Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon led a jount expedition in 1786-87. Each published an account entitled A voyage round the world, but more particularly to the north-west coast of America (1789),* Dixon's actually written by his supercargo William Beresford. Dixon subsequently became embroiled in a controversy with John Meares whose ships were seized by the Spanish in Nootka Sound in 1789, resulting in an international dispute. While defending himself in his Voyages made in the years 1788 and 1789, from China to the north west coast of America (1790)* Meares made claims to discoveries which ignored the work of his predecessors. Dixon immediatedly challanged his claims, prompting a reply from Meares and a further attack by Dixon.

The dispute over Nootka Sound brought to the west coast Captain George Vancouver, who was commanded to receive the territory back from the Spanish and to make an accurate survey of the shoreline. Vancouver had first visited the coast as a midshipman on Cook's last voyage twelve years before. On this visit Vancouver discovered the Gulf of Georgia which separated Vancouver Island from the mainland. The results of his survey are shown in a French edition of the atlas* published to accompany his Voyage of discovery to the North Pacific Ocean (1798). With this outstanding achievement the major outlines of Canada were complete.